

9. Homeless Children

When Salt Lake City submitted their numbers for the U.S. Conference of Mayors report, *The Continuing Growth of Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty in America's Cities: 1987*, there was only one of nine categories that showed no increase—the number of homeless youth. According to the report, that population had increased by "0" during the previous year.¹ The subsequent trends are not encouraging.

In January 1991, the Utah State Office of Education released their first report on homeless children and youth in Utah, covering the year 1990. The results were based on a survey sent to 34 homeless agencies statewide.

It must be emphasized that these numbers are identified homeless children—not runaway children or throwaway children. The count revealed that approximately 4,635 children and youth were homeless for some period of time in 1990. This represents approximately a 40 percent increase for agencies responding to both the 1989 and 1990 counts. The majority of these children and youth were sheltered in either safe houses or homeless shelters.²

From 1990 to 1991, the number of homeless sheltered children increased on a given night by 8 percent according to our point prevalence count; the State Office of Education studies show that the increase from the fiscal year 1990 to 1991 was 6 percent.³ Education shows that in 1990 there were 1,780 homeless children and youth in shelters in Utah, in 1990 there were 4,635, in 1992 4,849, in 1993 there were 4,680, and in 1994 the total had risen dramatically to 6,849.⁴ Our point prevalence counts suggest the following total numbers of homeless children and families in Utah on any given night:

| <u>Year</u> | <u># Homeless Children</u> | <u># Homeless Families</u> |
|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1990 ⁵ | 225 | 112 |
| 1992 | 339 | 186 |
| 1994 | 534 | 235 |
| 1996 | 472 | 219 |
| 1998 | 355 | 179 |

This suggests that significant progress has been made since 1994 in getting homeless families, including Homeless children, out of emergency shelters.

The Utah State Office of Education shows that the number of children at risk is high: 22,663 students were minorities receiving free or

¹Lilia M. Reyes and Laura DeKoven Waxman, *The Continuing Growth of Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty in America's Cities: 1987* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Mayors, December 1987), p. 41.

²[Marilyn Treshow], *Homeless Children and Youth in Utah, 1990 Report* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Office of Education, January 1991), pp. 4-5.

³Treshow, 1991, p. 4. Note that the report explains that the fiscal year is 1 July 1990 through 30 June 1991, and that "the population of Utah grew by approximately 2.5 percent during this same period. Consequently, we can estimate that the actual increase in sheltered homeless children grew by 3 percent." Our study is for the calendar year.

⁴Marilyn Treshow, *Homeless Children and Youth in Utah 1992 Report*, p. 13 and "Addendum to Homeless Children and Youth in Utah 1992 Report." The original report showed 4,424 for 1992, but returns totaling 492 more children came in from three tardy survey participants and these numbers resulted in the "Addendum"; Marilyn Treshow, *Homeless Children and Youth in Utah 1993 Report* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Office of Education, December 1993), p. v; Scott Bean, et al. [Marilyn Treshow], *Homeless Children and Youth in Utah 1994 Report* (Salt Lake City: November 1994), pp. 12-13.

⁵The numbers for 1990 are an estimate not based on a point prevalence count, which began in 1991.

reduced lunch, 6,659 children were school-aged, homeless, and not in shelters, and 3,010 school aged children were in homeless shelters. The only districts without any students in one of these categories were Daggett and North Summit.

It is argued that lack of schooling can perpetuate a cycle of homelessness,⁶ and that is one of the reasons Utah has developed special programs to address this problem. But in order to best target education dollars and programs to homeless children, one needs to know where they are. The State Office of Education found that "The largest concentration of homeless children and youth reported by shelters was in the Salt Lake area which reported 1,448. The second largest concentration was found in Provo with 861 homeless children and youth, and Ogden reported the third largest number of homeless children and youth with 722."⁷ However, there are also model programs in several other districts, as follows:⁸

Alpine School District

Alpine District served 267 homeless students during the 1992-93 school year. Dr. Victoria Anderson, Homeless Student Representative and Director of Pupil Personnel in Alpine District, reports surveying all schools within the district. Aides have been hired to work with students, some of whom are living in their cars, so these students do not fall behind in school. They work closely with the Summer Migrant Program and locate many homeless students through this program.

Davis School District

Ann Benson, Assistant Director of Pupil Personnel in Davis District and Homeless Student Representative, has collaborated with PTAs and other volunteer groups to form partnerships with local businesses in order to get school supplies for students, as well as personal hygiene items and clothing. She also provides in service training to sensitize principals and staff to the needs of homeless children and youth. Davis District identified 319 homeless students living within their boundaries.

Iron School District

Principal and Homeless Student Representative, Wayne Mifflin, has established Homeless Student Advocates in five elementary schools in Iron District. These individuals serve as tutors or advocates, depending on the needs. The District has marshaled resources to aid the homeless through on-going collaboration with Social Services, Iron County Care and Share, the Shelter for Domestic Violence, Housing Authorities, Piute Indian Tribe Liaisons, Job Services, and Rehabilitation Services. Their goal is to assemble a wider base of resources through contacts with private corporations such as Wal-Mart and K-Mart. Iron District staff served 258 students last year.

⁶Katherine Kapos, "Report Says Schooling Can End Cycle of Homelessness," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 12 March 1993.

⁷Treshow, 1993, p. 3.

⁸Treshow, 1993, pp. 3-5; we have quoted this report verbatim to describe these programs.

Provo School District

Provo District served 261 homeless students last year. Drew Bolander, Coordinator of Student Services and Homeless Student Representative, works closely with Mountainlands Community Action Program (CAP) and the Center for Women and Children in Crisis to provide for the education needs of students in shelters, those living in doubled up households, and those who live at the Hotel Roberts in Provo.

Washington School District

Washington District has a model program serving 443 homeless students. Dr. Brad Ferguson states that Liz Moody, teacher and homeless liaison in Washington District, is an extremely hard worker who has brought community awareness in St. George to the needs of homeless children. Liz Moody and Margaret Chapman, from the Office of Human Services, work as an exemplary team to identify and meet the needs of these students. Every case worker in the Department of Human Services in the south western county, is now examining their caseloads and referrals to identify homeless students and make contracts with local high schools.

Other Issues

Are homeless children attending school? The Office of Education reports that "School districts served 62 percent of the homeless middle school children and 48 percent of the high school youth. Only 25 percent of preschool (3-4) homeless children received education services and 10 percent of homeless infants and toddlers received child care."⁹ This is about the same as 1990, when the Office of Education reported that where data was available, 29 percent of the preschoolers attended a program; 49 percent of the elementary school age children, 63 percent of the junior high school age children, and 50 percent of the high school age children attended school.¹⁰

In addition to the information gathered by the Office of Education, the point prevalence count asked the number of homeless children enrolled in school programs or who received tutorial help; because so many children were out of school in the summer, we'll look only at the report for 31 January 1992: at that time, 78 percent of the homeless children aged 6-17 were in school; 30 percent of those five and under were in school, pre-school, or child care programs. Some of these children were tutored on site, others were mainstreamed, and some returned to their "school of origin." "Several rural shelters have requested increased tutorial school programs through their shelter, particularly when issues of child safety are of concern,"¹¹ reports the Office of Education.

The point prevalence counts also examined educational issues for children. Question number 16 was, "Reasons for children not attending school?" Of course in the summer, the major reason for non-attendance was because school was not in session, but one provider reported that "the 8- and 5-year-olds were in migrant Head Start prior to coming here. Did not return because the father would grab them."

The 31 January 1992 count did, however, give other reasons for non-attendance: "Ran out of funds for day care," "AFDC cases too long in opening - severe need!" "illness", "truancy," "didn't obtain a protective order yet", "she's needing to help [her mother]¹² earn rent & deposit money," "They were on the move and have not been any place long enough to get son (4 years old) started in Head Start or any other type of pre-school," "traveling," "home schooled - mother not settled in permanent residence, not sure where to send child to school - will be sending him within one week," "not planning to stabilize here because of lack of apartments," "not wanting to put children in and out of school," "any of our children who are not in school are out because they may be in danger of being matched [sic] by a non custodial abusive father. (Its happened -even w/ a child's P.O. [protective order] in place.) We have need of home bound teacher for high risk children."

The Office of Education lists many barriers to school attendance by homeless children and youth. "Of the 32 shelters surveyed," they write, "all reported that lack of basic necessities such as food, shelter, medical care, clothing, and transportation were barriers to school attendance. Shelter providers stated that 'living in car and camping' were barriers to school attendance. Only three of the 32 shelters reported problems with local school district policies."¹³

⁹Treshow, 1992, p. v.

¹⁰Treshow, 1991, p. 6.

¹¹Treshow, 1991, p. 6. The report notes that "Pilot projects were funded through the McKinney Act, and in Salt Lake and Ogden Districts, as well as the Bennion Center at the University of Utah (a student volunteer initiative). An additional 200 homeless children and youth in Utah received education services during the summer and fall of 1991 as a result of these innovative programs."

¹²Name of client deleted here.

¹³Treshow, 1993, p. 7. Also see Treshow, 1990, pp. 15-16; Treshow, 1992, p. 8.

Other barriers noted by the Office of Education include:¹⁴

- Families without shelter, food, and other basic necessities may not put a high priority on school attendance.
- Many homeless families lack a means of transportation to get their children to school.
- Because of transience, families may lack knowledge of the location, hours, enrollment requirements, etc. of the school within their new geographic area.
- Physical illness is relatively high among families living in shelters or cars as compared to other populations. This affects school attendance.
- Homeless students do not always feel that they are genuinely welcomed by local school personnel, teachers, or other students.
- Homeless parents may distrust the system and fear losing children if school officials find the parents are unable to provide their children with basic necessities of food, shelter, etc.

Elaborating on barriers placed by school districts on attendance, the Office of Education writes that "No fees may be charged at the elementary level. However, fees continue to be charged for many activities at the secondary level. The opinion has been stated by some that it will help teenage students to develop character and appreciation for the work ethic, if they work to earn money to pay school fees. However, homeless students may have difficulty finding jobs due to the lack of a permanent address and other crises which they may be facing." A second barrier placed by district administrations is lack of school records: "Frequent moves make school record and immunization record transfers complicated, but school personnel work with families to make accommodations. The Utah State Office of Education has initiated a procedure to assist with the transfer of school records in cases where parents are seeking relief from a situation involving abuse. Through this procedure, the parent and child's anonymity is maintained. If the abusive parent inquires about the children or family, they are referred to the Utah State Office of Education. Immunizations are required by Utah State Laws. Schools are accommodating homeless students by collaborating with local health departments to provide immunizations."¹⁵

In fact a frequent cause of homelessness among children and youth is that domestic violence, but the percent of the total population in homeless shelters who attribute their homelessness to domestic violence is only 3 to 5 percent, though 36 percent of the sheltered children on 31 July 1992 were in women's shelters. According to the July 1993 survey, 54 percent of the sheltered children were living with a single parent while 42 percent were living with both parents. By July of 1998, a reported 65 percent of families were headed by a single parent, of which 96 percent were females.

In addition to the education of homeless children, a central concern is the effects of homelessness on their physical as well as mental development. In 1987, an article by Ellen L. Bassuk appeared in a Boston Foundation report on homelessness. Mrs. Bassuk wrote:

The results of testing with these children corroborated our initial impressions. Forty-seven of the preschoolers manifested at least one developmental lag on the Denver Developmental Screening Test... Other studies have indicated that children growing up in poverty manifest deficits only in language skills. One third of the homeless children, in contrast, had difficulty not only with language skills but in fine and gross motor skills and social and personal development as well. In school-age children, almost half were extremely depressed and anxious... Not surprisingly, these high levels of anxiety and depression interfered with their capacity to learn. We found that 43 percent of the children had failed a grade, that 24 percent were in special classes, and that nearly half were currently failing or performing below-average work in school.¹⁶

The State Office of Education defines "the educational needs of homeless children and youth" as follows:¹⁷

- Homeless children and youth need to be welcomed and accepted by school personnel, teachers, and peers.
- Information needs to be readily accessible regarding curricula, textbook needs, expectations, etc.
- Parents must be informed of the programs available and how to access them.
- Transportation must be available.
- Fees must be waived where necessary for programs, immunizations, etc.
- Convenient day care must be provided for homeless teenage parents trying to continue their education.

¹⁴Treshow, 1991, pp. 6-7; Treshow, 1990, pp. 15-16; the former is identical to the latter except for a few additional words on item 4. Also see Treshow, 1992, p. 8.

¹⁵Treshow, 1993, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶Jill Kneerim, ed., *Homelessness, Critical Issues for Policy and Practice* (Boston, MA: The Boston Foundation, 1987), pp. 22-23.

¹⁷Treshow, 1991, p. 7; Treshow, 1992, p. 8. According to Treshow, "these [needs] are drawn from interviews with homeless students and parents, school personnel, and on-site observations."

- Homeless high school students need to receive credit for partially completed course work.

The State Office of Education has implemented specific rules, based on the Utah State Constitution, to insure "that homeless children have the opportunity to attend school with as little disruption as possible."¹⁸

¹⁸See Treshow, *1991*, pp. 16-17; also see pp. 18-19, where a Memorandum of 27 July 1990 from State Superintendent Scott W. Bean to District Superintendents and Principals insists "Utah law is quite clear in regard" to "education of the homeless," "making it even more important that all such problems be promptly and properly resolved." Superintendent Bean writes, "even though the 'residence' is a car, a cardboard box, or a heating grate with a blanket, the child is a resident entitled to free public education. The same applies if the family's permanent home is, or was, in a given district and the family has been forced to move but still considers that area home and is trying to find another home in the area."